February 1, 2025

Gene Wilder

Gene Wilder, born Jerome Silberman on June 11, 1933, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was a beloved American actor, comedian, writer, and filmmaker. He is best known for his comedic roles and his portrayal of Willy Wonka in "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory" (1971). Wilder's career began on stage, and he made his screen debut in an episode of the TV series "The Play of the Week" in 1961. His first major film role was as Leopold Bloom in "The Producers" (1967), which earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor. He collaborated with Mel Brooks on several films, including "Blazing Saddles" (1974) and "Young Frankenstein" (1974), the latter of which he co-wrote.

Wilder also starred in films with Richard Pryor, such as "Silver Streak" (1976) and "Stir Crazy" (1980). He directed and wrote several of his own films, including "The Woman in Red" (1984). After his last acting performance in 2003 on "Will & Grace," for which he received a Primetime Emmy Award, Wilder turned his attention to writing, producing a memoir and five other books.

In his personal life, Wilder was married four times. His third wife, comedian Gilda Radner, died of ovarian cancer in 1989, which led to his active involvement in promoting cancer awareness and treatment. He married his fourth wife, Karen Boyer, in 1991, and they remained together until his death. Wilder was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2013 and passed away on August 29, 2016, at the age of 83.

Wilder's life was marked by his dedication to his craft, his love for his family, and his efforts to raise awareness for cancer and Alzheimer's disease. His legacy continues to be celebrated through his films and the impact he made on comedy and entertainment.